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France: The good showing of the Gaullists in Sunday's election could only be offset by coordinated opposition tactics during the runoff on 12 March.

The Gaullists received 38 percent of the vote in the first round, duplicating their 1962 performance. Of the 470 seats for metropolitan France, Fifth Republic candidates won the major share of the 70-odd contests already decided and led in about 210 of the others, which will be decided on runoffs next Sunday. The outcome will be close in nearly half of the undecided races, and the relatively low abstention rate on the first round suggests that the Gaullists will not benefit appreciably, as they did in 1962, from a heavier vote during the second balloting.

The Communist party (PCF), which obtained 22 percent of the vote, achieved a major objective by running ahead of Francois Mitterrand's leftist federation, which received about 19 percent. With its pre-eminence among the parties of the left thus verified, the PCF may feel it can afford to withdraw in favor of federation candidates in more instances than strict reciprocity would demand. This tactic would make trouble for the Gaullists, particularly if the Communists also withdrew in favor of some center candidates, as they did in 1962. Such a tactic poses a dilemma for the PCF, however, because the party is satisfied with De Gaulle's foreign policy and fears it would be at a disadvantage if the federation and Jean Lecanuet's Democratic Center were strengthened at Communist expense.

The center, which competed for many of the same votes as the Gaullists and won only 13 percent of the vote, is now in a poorer bargaining position than it had expected.

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NOTE

El Salvador: [With about two thirds of the expected votes counted, unofficial estimates give the governing National Conciliation Party presidential candidate, Colonel Fidel Sanchez, a substantial lead in Sunday's election. The Christian Democratic Party is running second--but far behind. The Communist-backed Renovating Action Party and the rightist Salvadoran Popular Party are running a poor third and fourth. No major incidents have been reported.]

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